

## HABIT THE ROOT OF CULTURE

119

But generally it has been of inestimable benefit to mankind. The impulses of charity, modesty, and decency would fare badly in the struggling crowd of emotions were they not assisted by practice. Our instinctive impulses may, as we have seen, be grouped in a series of pairs: and mankind has agreed that, of each pair, one is more desirable than the other, so selecting the social, provident, kindly, and self-restraining impulses as of particular benefit to society. Impulses of these classes, when strengthened by habit, are the moral ideals, which are commended by philosophy and sanctified by religion. They have lit up the path of human endeavour. Habit may restrict the influence of religious reformers and radical politicians; but it affords civil governments some measure of stability. It enables them to forecast with some confidence the drift of public opinion, preserves the decencies of civilized life, and is the basis of the conventional morality which makes people respectable.

Habit appears to influence the behaviour of all living creatures. In the lower ranges of the animal kingdom it can find but little scope amidst the imperious mandates of directive instinct. As we ascend the scale, and the authority of instinct becomes less widely embracing, habit plays a part of increasing importance in regularizing behaviour.

And, since habit is the outcome of experience, whereas instinct is a hereditary constraint, the field for individuality in action gradually broadens. Such conduct as in man is guided by acquired habits. Amongst the lower vertebrates is very

<sup>1</sup> Plants show traces of memory or habit. They ordinarily make their strongest growth during the dark hours. But if day and night be reversed by the use of electric light, they will continue for a time to grow by the clock.